

BOOK REVIEW

Serbian–Israeli relations, edited by Rodoljub Orescanin, Novi Sad, Institute for National and International Security, 2019, 95 pp., no price (Internet publication), no ISBN

The Jewish and Serbian peoples share a long history of suffering. Perhaps this fact partly explains why the Serbian people traditionally adopted a rather tolerant attitude towards the Jewish minority in its midst in contradistinction to the intolerant attitudes prevalent for centuries amongst many of the other peoples of Europe. This joint history of suffering reached its apex during the Second World War, when Nazi Germany's local Croatian and Balkan Muslim allies slaughtered great numbers of Serbs, Jews and Roma alike. Likewise, the Second World War experience perhaps partly explains why the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia quietly assisted the State of Israel during the latter's War of Independence. 5

The relationship between the Jewish and Serbian peoples – and especially the relationship between the Jewish state and Yugoslavia/the Republic of Serbia – has thus far not received all that much attention from scholars. The present collection of nine brief papers, the outcome of a roundtable organised by the Institute for National and International Security (INIS), a Serbian think tank, therefore, is a welcome effort to redress this oversight. 10

The first Serbian contributor, Darko Trifunovic, the director of INIS, provides an overview of the Jewish–Serbian relationship, particularly during the twentieth century, emphasising the two peoples' status as victims of their common fascist and Islamist enemies. Darko Obradović, who is also affiliated with INIS, points out that the Jewish state's considerable achievements in the areas of agriculture and information technology make it an appealing economic partner for Serbia, whose own endeavours in these fields have not been nearly as productive. Rodoljub Orescanin, who is affiliated with the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, traces the historical road taken by the Jewish–Christian relationship in Europe, noting that it has changed substantially for the better since the end of the Second World War. The last Serbian contributor, Marija Vasic, summarises the story of the Serbian 'Righteous Amongst the Nations', those individuals who risked their own lives, as well as the lives of their families, to help Jews escape the clutches of the Shoah. 15 20 25 30

The first Israeli contributor is Shlomo Shpiro, a professor at Bar-Ilan University and an expert on the history of the Jewish state's intelligence services, who assesses the pivotal role played by Yugoslavia during the 1947–49 War of Independence by permitting arms that the Yishuv had purchased in Czechoslovakia to be transported across its territory to the Mediterranean Sea for transshipment to Israel. Barak Bouks, who is also affiliated with Bar-Ilan University, explores the ways in which democracies like Israel and Serbia can cooperate to counter the influence of 35 40

the so-called Afghan militias, armed Islamist organisations that engage in violence and terrorism throughout the Middle East and the Balkans. Shaul Shay, a senior researcher at the Institute for Counter-terrorism (ICT), part of the Interdisciplinary Centre (IDC) at Herzliya, not only covers some of the same ground as Shpiro with respect to Yugoslavia's support for Israel during the War of Independence, but also reviews the participation of Bosnian/Albanian Muslims – many of them former *Waffen*-SS members – in that war, particularly as members of the Arab Liberation Army (ALA). Jonathan Figchel, another researcher at the ICT, discusses the current level of cooperation between Israel and Serbia in the fight against Islamist violence and terrorism. The final Israeli contributor, Ephraim Lapid, a former senior intelligence officer in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and nowadays affiliated with Bar-Ilan University, relates the stories of two late IDF chiefs of staff, Haim Bar Lev and David Elazar, both of whom had roots in the lands of the former Yugoslavia.

Whilst this collection of papers, in short, certainly does not offer an in-depth and methodical review of either the broader relationship between the Jewish and Serbian peoples or the narrower relationship between their polities, it nevertheless contains a lot of valuable information about these relationships. Hence, even though it is episodic in its scope, this collection constitutes a useful introduction.

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